Fostering community, increasing affordability, and ensuring the 
economic and social sustainability of student housing at UBC.

Prepared by |
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issues related to this report.
Executive Summary

This report updates existing AMS policies on student housing, and approaches affordability and community building through the lens of UBC’s sustainability commitments. These commitments to economic, environmental, and social sustainability are found in Place and Promise: The UBC Plan.

After the AMS’ last comprehensive housing report in 2007, UBC responded with a number of positive actions. This included a pledge to double the amount of on-campus student housing to 16,000 beds. These actions and the increase in capacity addressed a critical need from UBC Vancouver students for additional on-campus housing opportunities. It is exciting to see many of these projects to increase capacity underway today.

However, housing capacity is only one aspect of student housing needs. Beyond capacity, there are two crucial issues facing student housing at UBC Vancouver. These are the affordability of the student housing stock, and building and maintaining community within our housing areas. The AMS has reviewed its housing policies, the state of student housing at UBC, and UBC’s sustainability commitments with these two unresolved issues in mind. The AMS also surveyed contemporary actions from the City of Vancouver and Metro Vancouver on these topics for a regional perspective.

This report is divided into five key sections, which include policy recommendations. For a brief overview, the AMS recommends:

1. The five unachieved recommendations from the 2007 AMS report “From Commuter Campus to Community Campus” are renewed.
2. Affordability for students is included under Sustainability’s first goal of Economic Sustainability in Place and Promise: The UBC Plan.
3. The Board of Governors cease to require a financial contribution from Student Housing and Hospitality Services.
4. The interest rate charged by the University on internal loans for student housing projects be removed or lowered, or distributed for student housing affordability initiatives.
5. The character and sense of community found within UBC’s family housing and diverse institutional housing be retained under Sustainability’s third goal of Social Sustainability in Place and Promise: The UBC Plan.

Moving forward, the AMS hopes to see both affordability and community at the forefront of conversations about student housing on campus. By broadening UBC’s commitment to sustainability and taking concrete actions to implement it, UBC can make significant inroads on the issues of housing affordability and sustainable student housing communities.
# 2007 AMS Housing Policy: Successes and Failures

Five year review of recommendations made in the AMS report entitled *Student Housing: From Commuter Campus to Community Campus*.¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PART</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
<th>AMS RECOMMENDED ACTION</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>UBC ACTION TAKEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Housing</td>
<td>Set informed housing targets for full-time undergraduate and graduate students</td>
<td>The formation of housing targets for full-time undergraduate and graduate students that are informed by a comprehensive review of the demand for non-institutional and institutional housing</td>
<td>ACHieved</td>
<td>UBC commissioned the 2008 Student Housing Demand Study to inform student bed targets, which were set at 25% of full-time students. UBC subsequently updated the Land Use Plan in 2010 with the following commitment: “UBC will aspire to provide capacity to accommodate student housing for up to 50% of the current (2010) full-time student population.”²</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Include a commitment in the Vancouver Campus Plan to review student housing</td>
<td>A commitment in the Vancouver Campus Plan to undertake an extensive review of both institutional and non-institutional student housing, with frequent follow-up reports in subsequent years</td>
<td>PARTIALLY ACHieved</td>
<td>No specific commitment was made to review student housing beyond the 2008 UBC Student Housing Demand Study, which recommended providing capacity for at least 45% of full-time students on campus.³</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The inclusion of more Key Policy Directions addressing student housing in the Vancouver Campus Plan</td>
<td></td>
<td>ACHieved</td>
<td>Two policies address student housing. One addresses capacity, the other addresses housing styles (traditional residences, student family housing, and independent-style living units).⁴</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PART</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
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<th>STATUS</th>
<th>UBC ACTION TAKEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conduct better consultation with students before changing student housing fees</td>
<td>Better consultation with students and AMS Council on changes to the rental fees of UBC Housing and Conferences in the same manner as tuition consultations at the very minimum</td>
<td>UNCLEAR</td>
<td>The recommendation for ‘better’ consultation is normative and as a result it is difficult to assess the extent to which this recommendation has been adopted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diversify institutional housing options</td>
<td>An increase proportional to demand in the number of available family housing units without sacrificing the number and variety of housing spaces available to other students</td>
<td>UNCLEAR</td>
<td>The 2008 UBC Student Housing Demand Study did not address student family demand outside of general student housing demand, making it difficult to assess this recommendation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Allowing part-time students with a sufficient credit load to apply for on-campus housing</td>
<td>PARTIALLY ACHIEVED</td>
<td>Current eligibility for undergraduate students requires registration in 18 credits in the winter session (9 credits per term). Graduate students must hold full-time status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New non-traditional residences that offer students a cultural experience, such as the Ritsumeikan-UBC House</td>
<td>PARTIALLY ACHIEVED</td>
<td>Specific cultural programming has not expanded significantly, beyond the Totem infill project Musqueam naming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The development of more mature housing units prioritised for graduate students</td>
<td>ACHIEVED</td>
<td>Mature student housing is planned in Ponderosa Commons, with expected occupancy in Sept. 2013. Other Commons are also expected to address upper-year undergraduates and graduate students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Institutional Housing</td>
<td>Fulfil the Housing Advisory Committee commitments</td>
<td>That the Housing Advisory Committee meet regularly and include an undergraduate student seat and a</td>
<td>NOT ACHIEVED</td>
<td>All references to the Housing Advisory Committee were removed from the Land Use Plan, the successor document to the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART</td>
<td>RECOMMENDATION</td>
<td>AMS RECOMMENDED ACTION</td>
<td>STATUS</td>
<td>UBC ACTION TAKEN</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>outlined in the OCP</td>
<td>graduate student seat, as per OCP requirements</td>
<td></td>
<td>OCP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That the University expand the role of the HAC to function as a resolution body for disputes related to the academic calendar and leases</td>
<td></td>
<td>NOT ACHIEVED</td>
<td>All references to the Housing Advisory Committee were removed from the Land Use Plan, the successor document to the OCP.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|      | Amend the OCP to set aggressive non-institutional student housing targets | An amendment to the OCP to set an informed and aggressive target of the percentage of new rental housing units to be designed and designated for students | NOT ACHIEVED | The updated Land Use Plan “sets as a goal that not less than 50% of new market and non-market housing serve households where one or more members work or attend university on the UBC campus.”
There are no specific targets for student only non-institutional rental units. |
|      | Create affordable non-institutional student housing | A much stronger commitment to provide rental housing in U-Town than the current 20 per cent rental quota outlined in the OCP | NOT ACHIEVED | The updated Land Use Plan requires that “20% of new residential dwellings will be rental housing, of which not less than half will be non-market housing.” |
|      | | An amendment to the OCP to remove the cap of 100 units per net hectare | ACHIEVED | The updated Land Use Plan contains no limitations on units per hectare. |
|      | | Leasing land to developers at substantial discounts on the condition that this land be used for affordable student housing for the duration of the lease | NOT ACHIEVED | This has not been implemented. |

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5 UBC Campus and Community Planning, Land Use Plan, 15.
6 UBC Campus and Community Planning, Land Use Plan, 16.
Summary of 2007 AMS Recommendations and their Implementation

Of the actions recommended in 2007, four have been wholly achieved and implemented by UBC, three have been partially achieved, and five have not been achieved. Accurate assessment of two is difficult due to normative recommendations or the lack of a baseline.

As of writing, the 2007 report has demonstrated significant success as an advocacy document, and has had a substantial impact on the student housing policy priorities of the University. In particular, the student housing demand study that was an outcome of the report sizably altered the University’s commitment to providing capacity to house students on campus. Its impact can be seen in the high number of student housing projects underway today. The authors of the 2007 report should be recognised for the positive, long-term effects that their strong policy suggestions have had on student housing at UBC.

While many of the report’s recommendations have been adopted, some recommendations have not received full consideration by UBC. Where these recommendations remain appropriate AMS policy and would make a positive impact on student housing, they have been suggested for renewal.

Achieved Actions

The four achieved actions include a very significant policy shift to provide capacity for 50% of full-time students to live on campus. This arose from the results of the Student Housing Demand Study conducted in 2008, which was part of the Campus Plan process and “also responded to the AMS request which was based on their major policy paper in 2008.”

Two key policy directions were also included in the Vancouver Campus Plan, both addressing providing capacity to house 50% of full-time students, and directing that new student housing will be a mix of “traditional residences, student family housing and independent-style living units.”

The third achieved action was an increase in mature and graduate student housing, which is currently being developed in a number of the mixed use ‘Commons’ projects, such as Ponderosa, and in Gage South. The final achieved action was an alteration to planning policy in the Land Use Plan to remove restrictions on the number of units per hectare that could be built, which allows the construction of smaller units in the non-institutional housing areas of campus.

Partially Achieved Actions

The partially achieved actions include both recommendations which should be renewed, and recommendations which should be discarded. The recommended action to undertake an extensive review of student housing demand on campus has been achieved, but no follow up report has yet been mandated. Given the high impact of the initial housing demand report in setting a number of informed housing policies, it would be of value to conduct a follow up report to reassess demand five years later.

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7 McClanaghan and Associates, UBC Student Housing Demand Study (2008), 1.
8 University of British Columbia, The UBC Vancouver Campus Plan Synopsis, 14.
While part time students “with a sufficient credit load” have not been allowed to apply for institutional housing, restrictions on who can apply have been relaxed to a minimum registration of 18 courses (9 credits per term) in the winter session. This provides significant flexibility for a full-time winter session student in need of summer housing by setting a low course load bar of 9 credits per winter term. The current eligibility rules address the sufficiency of credit load requirement to a fair degree, especially in the current institutional housing context where student demand exceeds supply. If demand and supply dynamics change dramatically in future, it may be worth revisiting the issue of what should be considered a sufficient credit load to be eligible to apply for housing.

The recommended action of “New non-traditional residences that offer students a cultural experience, such as the Ritsumeikan-UBC House” should be discarded, as it is not of core concern. Ritsumeikan-UBC House does not currently offer cultural programming.

Not Achieved Actions

All of the unachieved actions are related to non-institutional housing. Recommendations to improve the role of the Housing Advisory Committee were not accomplished, and references to the Housing Advisory Committee have been removed from the Land Use Plan. The Land Use Plan does not contain any targets for student only or student oriented rental units in non-institutional areas. The recommended action of a stronger commitment to providing rental units in non-institutional areas is similarly unachieved, with rental requirements remaining unchanged at 20% in spite of an opportunity to do so during a review of the Land Use Plan (originally the OCP) in 2010. The final recommended action, to lease land to developers at substantial discounts provided that the units built were affordable student housing, was also not achieved.

Under the current policy regime governing non-institutional areas, widespread student rental in non-institutional areas is not feasible given student budgets. The list of not-achieved actions brings into question whether the University is committed to the University Town ideal of a mixed demographic community in non-institutional areas that is inclusive of students. The University must be prepared to make policy concessions to make student rentals in non-institutional areas affordable and available if it is to achieve the ideals of the University Town.
Renewing 2007 Recommendations

The AMS recommends that the five unachieved recommendations from the 2007 AMS report “From Commuter Campus to Community Campus” be renewed.

The AMS recommends that the following unachieved or partially achieved actions from the 2007 report entitled From Commuter Campus to Community Campus be renewed:

- A commitment in the Vancouver Campus Plan to undertake an extensive review of both institutional and non-institutional student housing, with frequent follow-up reports in subsequent years.
- An increase proportional to demand in the number of available family housing units without sacrificing the number and variety of housing spaces available to other students.
- An amendment to the OCP to set an informed and aggressive target of the percentage of new rental housing units to be designed and designated for students.
- A much stronger commitment to provide rental housing in U-Town than the current 20 per cent rental quota outlined in the OCP.
- Leasing land to developers at substantial discounts on the condition that this land be used for affordable student housing for the duration of the lease.
Affordability and Economic Sustainability: Place and Promise

The AMS recommends that affordability for students be included under Sustainability’s first goal of Economic Sustainability in Place and Promise: The UBC Plan.

UBC Vancouver students face a housing affordability crisis. According to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), “The cost of adequate shelter [for both home ownership and rentals] should not exceed 30% of household income. Housing which costs less than this is considered affordable.” Since most full-time students are unable to concurrently earn a full-time income, in order to assess housing affordability within the context of the UBC student population, data reflecting BC youth of a similar average age earning a full-time income will be used.

Most undergraduates at UBC are aged 20 to 24 years, where the average undergraduate age is 20.3 years. According to BC Statistics, this age group’s median income is $10,877, where 30% of this is $3,262.10. Therefore, affordable rent on a per month basis for this age group would be $271.84 or less. In comparison, UBC’s current cheapest per month rent (shared room, dormitory style housing) is $499.37 per month. This is almost double what is considered affordable by CMHC (see Table 1).

Furthermore, a UBC one bedroom apartment comparable to other rentals in the City of Vancouver (Gage Apartments) rents for $1,183 per month, which adds up to $9,471 a year. This would be 87% of the median yearly income earned by UBC’s majority age group. While the average one bedroom apartment in Vancouver is also not affordable by CMHC definitions, its monthly rent is $880, which is $275 cheaper per month and $3,300 annually than the comparable UBC rate.

Table 1: Affordability Relative to UBC and Vancouver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rent per Month</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Relative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Shelter</td>
<td>$271</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UBC Cheapest Bed (Dorm)</td>
<td>$499</td>
<td>$227</td>
<td>1.84 x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UBC One Bedroom</td>
<td>$1,183</td>
<td>$912</td>
<td>4.35 x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver One Bedroom</td>
<td>$880</td>
<td>$608</td>
<td>3.24 x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Affordable Housing (online)
10 UBC Planning and Institutional Research, UBC Vancouver Campus Fact Sheet (2010), 1
11 BC Stats, Labour Market Outcomes of Young British Columbians (2009), 27
12 UBC Student Housing and Hospitality Services, Residence Fees Overview (online)
13 Canadian Mortgage and Housing Association, Apartment Vacancy Rates and Average Rents (2008)
14 Canadian Mortgage and Housing Association, Apartment Vacancy Rates and Average Rents (2008), 1
UBC has stated that its rates are at least at or below market rate, and that UBC is doing a good job in providing affordable and adequate housing. However, a studio at the Walter Gage Apartments rents for $892 per month, which is higher than any average studio rent in all of Vancouver, including the highest average monthly rental rate found in the Vancouver Central Business District where studios rent for $842 per month. To further contextualize this situation, the average Vancouver studio is priced at $779 per month, while studios in neighbourhoods adjacent to the UBC campus (ex. Kitsilano) offer studios for $800 per month.

Table 2: Relative Affordability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus Studio</th>
<th>Average City Studio</th>
<th>Average Neighbourhood Studio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Year</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UBC</td>
<td>$7,137</td>
<td>$892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYU</td>
<td>$18,216</td>
<td>$2,777</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, UBC often attributes its high residence rates on the expensive real-estate climate. However, when we consider other universities in cities with expensive real-estate prices, we can see that other universities are far more affordable than UBC. For example, a studio apartment at New York University costs $2,777 per month. Although much more expensive than a studio at UBC, this is below market rate in the neighbourhood in which the school is situated. This apartment, and most of the NYU campus, is found within the Greenwich Village area where the average studio apartment is listed for $2,400 per month.

**Place and Promise**

In order to address student housing affordability on campus, and to ensure that it is given serious consideration in the long-term, housing affordability should be included in UBC’s commitment to sustainability. Currently, *Place and Promise* outlines nine commitments, including to sustainability, where “the University explores and exemplifies all aspects of economic, environmental and social sustainability”.

The first goal under sustainability acknowledges economic sustainability as “aligning resources with the University vision and strategic plan and deploying them in a sustainable and effective manner”. To implement this goal, the University has outlined three actions: “(1) a

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15 UBC Student Housing and Hospitality Services, *Residence Fees Overview* (online)
16 Canadian Mortgage and Housing Association, *Apartment Vacancy Rates and Average Rents* (2008), 4
17 Canadian Mortgage and Housing Association, *Apartment Vacancy Rates and Average Rents* (2008), 4
18 Canadian Mortgage and Housing Association, *Apartment Vacancy Rates and Average Rents* (2008), 4
19 New York University, *Undergraduate Housing Rates* (2011)
21 UBC, *Place and Promise: The UBC Plan* (2009), 26
22 UBC, *Place and Promise: The UBC Plan* (2009), 27
budgeting framework that allocates resources based on strategic goals, (2) deliver a balanced budget, [and] (3) provide a solid financial foundation for long-term success”\(^{23}\).

We can situate UBC’s current economic sustainability goal and broader sustainability goals in line with current City of Vancouver sustainability practices. In 2005 the City adopted a definition for sustainability where “a sustainable Vancouver is a community that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”\(^{24}\) At the core of these principles is that the basic needs of the community be met. The City has outlined basic needs to include “appropriate and affordable housing.”\(^{25}\)

Furthermore, in Metro Vancouver’s 2010 Sustainability Framework, one of three goals is to “build community capacity and social cohesion.”\(^{26}\) Intended outcomes from this goal are similar to those found in *Place and Promise*, where commitments are meant to promote learning, social cohesion, critical thinking, and respect. Moreover, under strategic priorities, the region identifies “affordable housing for everyone”\(^{27}\) and commits “to increase the supply of modest cost housing for owners and renters.”\(^{28}\) UBC already has a commitment in *Place and Promise* to provide a “variety of affordable on-campus housing” for faculty and staff, but has neglected to do the same for students.\(^{29}\)

With that in mind, the AMS would like the University to take a holistic approach to economic sustainability by adopting affordability as one of its goals. By making this change the University’s economic sustainability goals will not only encompass a balanced UBC budget, but will also aid its students in balancing their own budgets through the implementation of affordable student housing rates. By adopting affordability as a pillar of its economic sustainability commitments, the University will be able to address issues of social sustainability (basic needs, such as housing) in an innovative and economically sustainable way.

\(^{23}\) UBC, *Place and Promise: The UBC Plan* (2009), 27
\(^{24}\) City of Vancouver, *Definition of Social Sustainability* (2005), 3
\(^{25}\) City of Vancouver, *Definition of Social Sustainability* (2005), 3
\(^{26}\) Metro Vancouver, *Metro Vancouver Sustainability Framework* (2010), 10
\(^{27}\) Metro Vancouver, *Metro Vancouver Sustainability Framework* (2010), 13
\(^{28}\) Metro Vancouver, *Metro Vancouver Sustainability Framework* (2010), 13
\(^{29}\) UBC, *Place and Promise: The UBC Plan* (2009), 26
Affordability and Economic Sustainability: Financial Contributions

The AMS recommends that the Board of Governors cease to require a financial contribution from Student Housing and Hospitality Services.

According to the results of the AMS Academic Experience Survey, only 7% of students either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “there is an adequate amount of affordable student housing on campus”. Not only did 58% of students not support that statement, but 28% strongly disagreed, indicating a lack of confidence in UBC’s provision of affordable student housing. This concern was not less amongst those currently living on campus, but rather heightened: 33% of students living on campus disagreed with this statement, and 38% strongly disagreed for a total statement rejection of 71%.

To increase student housing affordability, the University faces one core issue: reducing the costs that student housing is required to pay as an ancillary. If this can be achieved, rents can be lowered to more affordable rates for those most in need.

In 2010/2011, UBC Student Housing and Hospitality Services (SHHS) was forecast to pay a $4,200,000 contribution to UBC central administration from their student housing department, and in 2011/2012 was planned to pay a $4,400,000 contribution. These payments do not go towards funding operational expenses or debt obligations of SHHS, which are captured within SHHS’ operating budget and are fully paid before this transfer. As the sole source of revenue for the student housing department is rent, student renters are paying a significant amount of money to UBC central administration that is above and beyond the costs associated with student housing.

With 6,479 undergraduate and graduate students living at UBC-Vancouver in 2010/2011, the 2010/2011 contribution was approximately $648 per student living on campus. If SHHS had been relieved from this contribution requirement, it would have been possible to reduce UBC-Vancouver housing rents by over $600 per year and still pay, in full, all of the costs of providing student housing. In effect, this contribution is a direct charge that is passed on to renters and is unrelated to the provision of the housing that they use.

While this sizeable contribution requirement remains in place, there is additional financial pressure placed on SHHS that is unrelated to the maintenance or provision of actual housing units. Were this contribution requirement removed, some financial pressure would be lifted from SHHS. This could allow lower rent for all students, or targeted rent-reduction for students most in need.

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31 UBC Operating Budget 2011/2012 Presentation, 55.
32 UBC Planning and Institutional Research, UBC Vancouver Campus Fact Sheet (UBC, 2011), 1.
Affordability and Economic Sustainability: Financing Costs

The AMS recommends that the interest rate charged by the University on internal loans for student housing projects be removed or lowered, or distributed for student housing affordability initiatives.

Student housing at UBC, which is run by Student Housing and Hospitality Services (SHHS), works on a cost-neutral model. This means that rental revenues are meant to be roughly equal to the costs SHHS has to pay to provide housing.

The costs of providing student housing can be split into two parts – operating costs, and capital costs. Operating costs cover everything that is necessary to keep housing running today, such as cleaning, maintenance, utilities and water, and staffing needs. On the other hand, capital costs are the costs associated with building residences, including loans and interest payments on those loans. Student rents cover both of these costs, which is why UBC claims that it has a cost neutral student housing system provided by SHHS.

It is absolutely true that SHHS works on a cost neutral basis when considered as a self contained administrative unit. However, a lot of the costs that SHHS has to pay come from other parts of UBC – especially when it comes to capital costs. Because SHHS is part of UBC, UBC can require it to use other UBC resources, whether or not there are cheaper options available.

As a result, if UBC chooses to pass costs on to SHHS at an inflated price, SHHS would have no option but to pay for these higher costs by charging students more in rent. UBC as a whole would then makes a profit off student housing, even though SHHS would remain cost neutral.

This has a serious impact on what students pay when it comes to construction of new residences. Under the current model, SHHS cannot borrow from normal external lenders, like banks. Instead, UBC requires SHHS to take out internal loans for building new residences from the UBC endowment, and charges profit seeking levels of interest on these internal loans of approximately 5.75%. UBC is lending to a part of itself and requiring a highly profitable return.

Because of the enormous expansion in the number of new residences under construction, the inflation of SHHS’ costs due to this profit seeking interest rate is substantial. In the 2011/2012 financial year, SHHS interest and debt repayments to the University were projected to be in excess of $26 million, out of total SHHS costs of $77 million. While $8 million was to pay back money that was borrowed, just under $18 million, or approximately 23%, was for interest payments alone.
As the sole source of revenue for a cost-neutral SHHS, any increase in costs that SHHS is forced to pay must be paid by student rents. In 2011/2012, almost 23% of all student rent went to creating a profit for the UBC endowment on money lent to SHHS. If UBC were not charging interest on these loans, student rents could be 23% lower across the board, SHHS would still remain cost-neutral, and the endowment would not shrink because it would still be fully paid back.

If left unaltered, the current financing arrangement presents a serious threat to the future affordability of units on campus. With a near-term construction schedule of thousands of student beds, SHHS faces enormous future construction costs. Combined with the profit-seeking interest rate that SHHS is mandated to pay when borrowing money from UBC, costs are going to spike significantly – as are rents.

It simply does not make sense to charge profit-seeking interest rates on internal University loans if student housing is to be affordable in the long run. Currently, internal loans to SHHS face the same expectation of financial return as external investments. However, these internal loans face few of the risks associated with external investments, and provide a critical asset to the University community. While research shows that students living on campus achieve better grades, feel more connected to the institution, and gain a host of other benefits, the expectation of market-level investment profits from internal loans is pricing students out of the university community.

To ensure student affordability, something has to change. UBC is not surrounded by a housing market that will provide affordability on its own, and UBC needs to recognise what is perhaps the single greatest inculcator of campus culture and alumni engagement – a vibrant, diverse, and appreciative student resident community. UBC is short-changing its future by not recognising the opportunity to provide student affordable housing.

One option would be to grant SHHS a lower, non-profit making rate of interest when borrowing from the endowment for student housing purposes, or to remove the interest requirement entirely. Another option would be to transfer the interest back to SHHS and earmark it for the provision of affordable student housing. This would allow the funds to offset the looming affordability crisis created by the high interest rates and high borrowing needs of SHHS in potentially innovative ways.
Community as Social Sustainability

The AMS recommends that the character and sense of community found within UBC’s family housing and diverse institutional housing be retained under Sustainability’s third goal of Social Sustainability in Place and Promise: The UBC Plan.

As the student-family housing complex Acadia Park is slated for redevelopment, the current family-friendly and ground oriented design, as well as community spirit will be demolished along with the buildings. In order to combat this, the University must place increased importance on retaining such intangible qualities that create sustainable and vibrant communities at UBC. According to the City of Vancouver’s definition of sustainability, for communities to be sustainable they must be able to “maintain and build on its own resources and have the resiliency to prevent and/or address problems in the future.”

As it stands, Acadia Park embodies what a socially sustainable community is; it is viable, socially self-supporting, and exudes community spirit, and deep networks of camaraderie and trust. This sense of community is fostered by the ground-oriented design, open green spaces, human-scaled development, and ultimately family and child-friendly accommodation. Furthermore, these features of the built environment have been shown to have positive health effects on inhabitants, from “restorative effects on both mental and physical health”, to “increased cognitive function in low-income children,” and even lower incidence of domestic violence. Therefore, with the impending redevelopment plans threatening the density of the area, the sustainability of the community is also threatened.

To further illustrate the need to conduct transparent and effective public consultation, a critical eye can be turned to the Little Mountain Housing Project as a Vancouver case study showing a community consultation process for a family development similar to Acadia Park. The Little Mountain Housing Project was a social housing development built in 1954. It was BC’s first social housing project, built to accommodate low-income families. The original development was built to reflect an environment conducive to family and child-friendly interactions, which included plenty of open green space and ground-oriented units.

The Little Mountain Housing redevelopment began similarly to the Acadia Park process currently underway. The housing units were decommissioned because they were “at their last leg”. In turn, the residents had to bear the burden of moving to other social housing, often far from their existing jobs, children’s schools and social networks. These are all problems similar to those currently facing many of the Acadia Park residents. Although the AMS understands that the

33 City of Vancouver, Definition of Social Sustainability (2005), 3
34 Laura Jackson, The relationship of urban design to human health and condition (Raleigh: Elsevier, 2002), 192-3
University is providing residents with the option of moving elsewhere on campus, this move is tearing a community and social network apart.

Since the decommissioning process is already underway, moving forward greater consideration can be given to the value of social capital and the networks formed in a community such as Acadia Park. Residents need to be fully involved in the planning process as the redevelopment moves to its next stage. This is where the experience at the Little Mountain Housing Project serves as a cautionary tale of what can happen when consultation is poor or poorly reflected in the planning process. Through the multi-year process since the redevelopment and displacement of residents began, there has been tremendous community support and input regarding the redevelopment process with little in return from the City of Vancouver. This case study highlights the importance of good public consultation, and the outcomes that stem from these meetings.

At the beginning of the Little Mountain consultation process, community members and former residents collaborated with architects and urban designers to envision what they hoped the new Little Mountain Housing development would look like. The AMS believes an urban design exercise such as this would be very valuable in capturing the sense of community and character of the current neighbourhood. What can be learnt from the Little Mountain case is that it is important to reflect the concerns of residents if the character and sense of community is to be maintained. As the Little Mountain Housing Project moves into its first building stage this spring, many models do not include features that residents were hoping for, such as outdoor gathering spaces and lower density. By referring to the early meetings with community residents, it is clear that their renditions of the Little Mountain neighbourhood are not reflected in the most recent plans (see Appendix A).

In light of this, the AMS would like to urge the University to engage in thorough and thoughtful consultations with community residents. In order to retain existing features and to create new design elements which add the atmosphere conducive to a vibrant community, the University must carefully listen to the concerns of current Acadia Park residents. The AMS recommends that the University include community building and retention in *Place and Promise* under social sustainability. This would be a promise not only to the residents of family housing developments today, but to those of future generations, that the positive spirit and sense of community fostered by Acadia Park will not be lost in the redevelopment.
Summary of Policy Recommendations

The AMS recommends:

1. **The five unachieved recommendations from the 2007 AMS report *From Commuter Campus to Community Campus* be renewed.**
   - a. A commitment in the Vancouver Campus Plan to undertake an extensive review of both institutional and non-institutional student housing, with frequent follow-up reports in subsequent years.
   - b. An increase proportional to demand in the number of available family housing units without sacrificing the number and variety of housing spaces available to other students.
   - c. An amendment to the OCP to set an informed and aggressive target of the percentage of new rental housing units to be designed and designated for students.
   - d. A much stronger commitment to provide rental housing in U-Town than the current 20 per cent rental quota outlined in the OCP.
   - e. Leasing land to developers at substantial discounts on the condition that this land be used for affordable student housing for the duration of the lease.

2. **Affordability for students be included under Sustainability’s first goal of Economic Sustainability in *Place and Promise: The UBC Plan.***

3. **The Board of Governors cease to require a financial contribution from Student Housing and Hospitality Services.**

4. **The interest rate charged by the University on internal loans for student housing projects be removed or lowered, or distributed for student housing affordability initiatives.**

5. **The character and sense of community found within UBC’s family housing and diverse institutional housing be retained under Sustainability’s third goal of Social Sustainability in *Place and Promise: The UBC Plan.***
Appendix A

Urban Design Concept #1: Stanley King – Little Mountain Public Consultation 2010

Urban Design Concept #2: Holborn Concept shown January 2012

35 City of Vancouver, Stanley King Experience (2010)
36 City of Vancouver, Little Mountain Redevelopment – Urban Design Principles (2012), 8
The purpose of comparing these images is twofold. First, it shows that the concerns of Little Mountain residents were not fully reflected in the redevelopment plans. Second, it exemplifies how an urban design exercise of this nature could prove beneficial in the Acadia Park public consultation process as a tool used to ensure accountability throughout the redevelopment.

Many discrepancies can be seen between the design renderings; most glaring is the increased building heights and lack of green space found in the Holborn design, meanwhile mid-rise buildings and green space dominate the images Little Mountain residences had hoped to see. Furthermore, Little Mountain community members were not opposed to change, so long as the old character of their familiar neighbourhood was retained. But many aspects of the old complex, such as its child-friendly and ground oriented design, and open public and shared green space cannot be found in the most recent design renderings of the redevelopment. Instead, features such as increased density, a moat surrounding a building, and pavers, dominate the landscape where grassy play areas and children used to be.

What can be drawn from the Little Mountain experience is that this type of exercise is integral in ensuring the accountability of UBC to the residents of Acadia Park, now and into the future. By having current Acadia Park residents participate in an urban design session, UBC and Acadia Park residents will have assurance that there is a record that can be referred to by both sides to judge how successful the public consultation really is.